

Transit Development Plan

Needs Analysis

As a prelude to developing service strategies in the TDP, the needs for improved public transportation were identified. Input from CCTA riders and the general public was solicited through a series of surveys about the most important improvements CCTA could make to its service. In addition, an analysis was conducted based on the information presented in prior chapters on the existing service and market analysis.

Needs Identified in Recent Data Collection and Outreach

In May of 2008, CCTA conducted an on-board passenger survey. Among other things, this survey asked riders about potential service improvements. In July of 2008, public meetings were held as part of the State's Short Range Public Transportation Plan process to solicit opinions about transit service. Finally, in the Spring of 2009, CCTA conducted a telephone survey of Chittenden County residents and a web survey open to all interested parties but targeted to Chittenden County residents. Needs identified by survey respondents and attendees at the public meetings are summarized below.

In the 2008 on-board survey, riders were asked to mark up to three choices (from a list of 11) for ways to improve service. The top eight choices are shown below in rank order, along with the percentage of riders who chose that option.

1. More service on Sunday	55%
2. Later hours in PM	44%
3. More frequency	35%
4. More service on Saturday	31%
5. Faster, more direct	19%
6. More shelters	19%
7. Routes to more locations	15%
8. Earlier hours in AM	15%

Among the requests for routes to more locations, the following four communities were cited most often:

Town	Number of Requests
1. Milton	16
2. Colchester	12
3. Hinesburg	4
4. Jericho	3

The telephone and web surveys also asked about desired locations for new routes. The following were the most commonly mentioned:

2009 Telephone			2009 Web		
<i>Town</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Pct.</i>	<i>Town</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Pct.</i>
Colchester	103	10.4%	Colchester	52	13.0%
Williston	85	8.6%	Burlington	50	12.5%
Essex	81	8.1%	Williston	42	10.5%
Milton	65	6.5%	So. Burlington	38	9.5%
So. Burlington	61	6.1%	Essex	34	8.5%
Jericho	56	5.6%	Winooski	28	7.0%
Burlington	54	5.4%	Hinesburg	22	5.5%
Charlotte	51	5.1%	Richmond	21	5.3%
Richmond	51	5.1%	Shelburne	21	5.3%
Underhill	51	5.1%	Bolton	17	4.3%
Shelburne	50	5.0%	Charlotte	16	4.0%
Hinesburg	47	4.7%	Jericho	15	3.8%
Winooski	39	3.9%	Milton	14	3.5%
Westford	21	2.1%	Underhill	13	3.3%

By public consensus, it seems that Colchester is the community in the greatest need of more service. Several communities that already have service (such as Burlington, Williston, Essex, and South Burlington and Winooski) are mentioned frequently as needing new routes. As coverage is reasonably thorough in at least some of those communities, these mentions should be interpreted as requests for a higher level of service on existing routes, and/or connections to areas other than downtown Burlington. After Colchester, the community with little present service mentioned most often is Milton. Telephone and web survey respondents agreed that “regional commuter” routes, such as those that would connect Milton, Colchester, or Hinesburg to Burlington are the highest priority, over interregional commuters (like the existing LINK Express routes) or all-day local services.

As mentioned at the beginning of this memorandum, extending the reach of CCTA services to more communities was the primary interest of telephone survey respondents, likely because a higher percentage of them (compared to the web and on-board surveys) were non-riders and lived outside of the urban core. The following figures show how telephone and web survey respondents ranked five categories of possible improvements to CCTA service:

2009 Telephone

Average ratings shown – higher score is better (range 1 to 5)

Hours – 3.27

Frequency – 3.25

Amenities – 1.95

Coverage – 4.17

Speed – 2.45

2009 Web

Number of top rankings

Hours – 30

Frequency – 34

Amenities – 2

Coverage – 24

Speed – 23

While span of service seemed to be the most important item for current riders (as shown on the previous page), frequency of service seems to rank just as high or higher among telephone and web survey respondents. All three surveys agree that speed of service and amenities (such as better shelters) are relatively less important.

Another interesting contrast between the views of current riders and the mix of riders and non-riders in the telephone and web surveys is that when it comes to hours of service, current riders feel strongly about having more weekend service, especially Sunday service, while telephone and web respondents ranked expansion of weekday service most highly, and Sunday service last.

Comments received from the general public and from invited stakeholders in July 2008 largely echo the findings from the data collection efforts. Routes, especially commuter routes, were requested from the following communities:

- Colchester
- Hinesburg (and Bristol via Hinesburg)
- Milton
- Jericho
- Westford
- Essex
- Underhill
- Williston
- New North End of Burlington
- Richmond-Williston via US 2
- Cambridge
- Grand Isle (ferry connection)

In addition, improved weekend and weekday night service was requested to assist people who work at those times.

Unmet Needs

The answer to the question “what are the greatest unmet needs for public transportation in Chittenden County” depends on whom is asked. For residents outside of the urban core, the answer is clearly new commuter routes to outlying communities such as Colchester, Milton, Hinesburg, Jericho and Richmond. For residents of communities that already have some service, the answer is longer hours (including weekend service) and higher frequency on the existing routes. Additional connections, such as cross-town links between the two parts of South Burlington, would also expand the travel options of current riders.

In the transit industry, 30-minute service is considered to be unattractive to choice riders, while 15-minute service in the peak periods is considered a significant threshold to making transit competitive with driving. This threshold mainly relates to the amount of time people are willing to wait if they just miss a bus. With a 30-minute wait until the next bus, most people with a car available will not risk having to wait for that long, and thus will not attempt to take the bus at all.

For years, CCTA has been slowly building ridership by offering 30-minute service on almost all of its routes. It is clearly recognized, though, that 15-minute peak service is desirable on all of the main corridors leading into Burlington; a goal that was endorsed in the recent Burlington Transportation Plan. In 2008, after successfully obtaining a grant of federal Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality money from the State, CCTA established 15-minute peak service on the Essex Junction route, and promptly saw ridership jump by some 30% on that route.

Given the experience on the Essex Junction route, establishing 15-minute peak service on the four major corridors into Burlington—North Ave, Colchester Ave/Pearl Street (VT 15), Williston Road/Main Street (US 2), and Shelburne Road (US 7)—is likely to be the most cost-effective investment in new service that CCTA can make. Service on US 2 would be the best candidate for short-term implementation, given the demonstrated ridership demand in that corridor.

Expanding the hours of service on CCTA routes is likely to be the next most cost-effective investment. Service offered 14-16 hours per day (such as 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.) is considered to be the minimum needed to attract choice riders. In addition to more evening service, Sunday service on the four major corridors, with the Essex Junction route leading the way, would generate additional ridership.

Extending service to new places is critical to CCTA’s mission as a regional public transportation service provider, but is somewhat less likely to be as cost-effective (in terms of cost per new rider) than boosting service on existing routes. Peak-period commuter services linking outlying areas with the regional core have been proven successful with the interregional LINK Express routes (which also serve Chittenden County communities through park-and-ride lots). Commuter service to surrounding communities such as Colchester, Milton, etc. (see Figure 1) would likely be successful, but would take more time to mature and reach their full potential.

It should be noted that a higher level of service on the core system will make the future commuter routes more attractive when they are implemented, by allowing for better access throughout the regional core through transfers in the downtown. In sum, better frequencies, spans of service, and days of service offered in the existing core service area will bring the most ridership for the least cost, due to the residential and commercial density in this area, while expansion to outer areas can help expand the future market for public transportation.

In addition to the above, the 2007 Human Service Transportation Coordination Plan identified transportation service gaps and unmet needs in Chittenden County. Types of needs were divided into three categories: general, employment-related, and human service-related. They included the following:

- Service outside current CCTA member towns, especially to new developments in Williston
- Institution of flexible routing
- Additional bus stops within Burlington
- Commuter service between Burlington and Bennington
- Increased E&D funding to meet the demand for service, especially ongoing medical trips
- Transportation to senior meal sites

Figure 1 Future Regional Commuter Corridors

